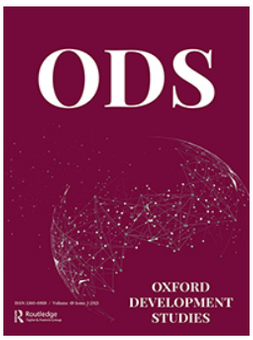

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ABSTRACT
The UN calls for the elimination of child labour by 2030, and its 'worst forms' by 2025. Implicit in this mandate is the assumption that children's work is harmful, yet no coherent theory of harm exists within the child labour field. Moreover, evidence suggests that simply removing children from supposedly harmful work is often damaging. This paper explores how harm may be understood and identified in the context of children's work. It reviews and synthesises literature from multiple disciplines, pointing towards a more situated and nuanced approach to harm that incorporates both 'subjective' and 'objective' dimensions.

KEYWORDS
Harm; child labour; children's work; sdg8

Introduction

The United Nations calls for the elimination of child labour by 2030, and its 'worst forms' by 2025. Implicit is the idea that children's work is harmful, yet no coherent theory of harm exists within the child labour field. Moreover, evidence suggests that removing children from 'harmful work' may itself be harmful. So what *is* harm? And how should we understand it? This paper explores this conundrum and asks how might we better theorise and identify harm in children's work? It begins by outlining the institutional perspective centred around the International Labour Organisation (ILO), explaining how and why this is problematic. It reviews literature across multiple disciplines to establish what those can contribute to understanding and theorising harm. And it concludes with suggestions for how we may better identify and address it, including by shifting attention towards the state that harm prevention implicitly seeks to promote – wellbeing.

Harm and child labour: institutional definitions and their discontents

As the guardian of global labour standards, the ILO is mandated to define and differentiate acceptable from unacceptable work. It does so through negotiations between governments, employer associations, and unions. The agreed definitions become conventions representing benchmark norms around work. With children, the key conventions are those on *Minimum Age* (C138) and *Worst Forms of Child Labour* (C182) (ILO, 1973, 1999).

These define child labour as work that is "mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and/or interferes with their schooling" (ILO-IPEC, 2012, p. 31). This is further defined by age, with activities beyond household chores considered harmful for younger children (ILO-IPEC n.d.a). The 'worst forms' include extremes like slavery alongside work which 'by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children' (ibid.).

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Evidently, harm here is vital. But despite its voluminous writings, the ILO has never formally defined 'harm,' nor articulated how to do so. Evidence suggests this is problematic, because it has led those in power to define as harmful what they see as (potentially) damaging, without consulting working children. This has had significant impacts for children, particularly through interventions to 'protect' them by removing them from work (Bourdillon, Levison, Myers, & White, 2010; Howard, 2016; Ling, Myers, & Boyden, 1998).

Boyden and Myers (1995) conducted one of the seminal studies into these impacts in the Bangladeshi garment sector. In the 1990s, US Senator Tom Harkin tabled a bill to ban Bangladeshi textile imports unless employers could show they were 'child-labour free.' Thousands of children found themselves unemployed overnight, with many ending up in worse conditions on the streets, in sex work, or in factories under the radar. Pakistani anthropologist Ali Khan (2007) tells a similar story with football stitchers in Sialkot. Before international pressure bore on sports firms importing footballs from Pakistan, stitching was an important Sialkoti cottage industry. Poor families would stitch in their homes, and children, when not in school, would help under the supervision of parents. When this changed, Omar, a 14-year-old, explained, 'We used to be able to stitch footballs when we needed to. Now there are no footballs coming to the homes for stitching. Why have they stopped our *rozi-roti* [means of living]? . . . They must hate us' (ibid. 53). Similar stories abound from rural settings across the world (e.g. Bourdillon, 1999; Bourdillon et al., 2010).

At the heart of these studies is the idea of harm, and specifically that removing children from work assumed to be harmful may not be in their best interests because it causes further harm. Primarily (though not exclusively), this harm is understood in the critical literature in terms of children being denied access to resources that they and their families need. This has been shown by scholars in contexts as different as West Africa and South America. In research by one of the present authors, teenage migrant workers from Benin who were removed from or denied access to work opportunities furiously accused those responsible of making their lives worse (Howard, 2016). Taft (2013), Taft (2019) and Liebel (2004) have documented similar things amongst working children's movements in South America.

Anthropological and sociological perspectives on harm

Within anthropological and sociological critiques of mainstream approaches to child labour and the 'harm' at the heart of it, there sits a well-grounded, widespread assessment that work can be, and often is, beneficial for children. In their recent overview of the literature on children's work and wellbeing, Aufseeser, Bourdillon, Carothers, and Lecoufle (2018) martial evidence showing that work contributes to children's wellbeing in at least the following ways:

(1) by sustaining them and their families materially;
(2) by enabling them to continue schooling or other education as a result of earnings;
(3) by providing them with skills, including those which may offer a future livelihood;
(4) psychosocially, by fostering a sense of competence and self-esteem;
(5) by developing their social skills and relations;
(6) by enabling their socialisation into maturity and collective responsibility;
(7) by enabling their social transition into adulthood, including through providing the resources necessary for marriage.

The first point has been discussed above. The second point is interesting and, from a mainstream policy perspective, often counter-intuitive. A common policymaker assumption is that children's work sits within an 'either/or' relationship with education. Yet a large body of data show that, in many cases, children are able to prolong their schooling in contexts where it carries hidden or heavy opportunity costs precisely by working, including in circumstances deemed harmful. Okyere (2017)

has demonstrated this in Ghana with a case study of children working in quarries. His findings are echoed by Maconachie and Hilson (2016) amongst artisanal miners in Sierra Leone, as well as in case studies from across Africa by Hashim and Thorsen (2011). With regards to Point 3, it is important to note that formal education in the global South is often of poor quality, with few quality employment opportunities arising from it. Given that school is not necessarily a guarantee of better future employment, learning practical, marketable skills is attractive for children and parents alike (Morrow & Boyden, 2018).

In relation to Points 4–7, it is worth remembering that the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) understands education in broad terms. Its goal is 'to develop the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential', and to nurture citizens able to participate fully in the human community (UNCRC, Article 29.1a). Anthropological literature on children's work suggests that it can be beneficial in precisely these terms. Data from all continents show that young workers feel pride and self-esteem when able to contribute to their families' wellbeing through work (e.g. Crivello, Vennam, & Komanduri, 2012). This breeds confidence and fosters resilience, which is vital in contexts of socioeconomic vulnerability and only obtainable through exposure to hazards that one learns to manage (Boyden & Mann, 2005; Liborio & Ungar, 2010; Sabates-Wheeler & Sumberg, 2020. Likewise, work offers children a chance to develop social skills and through these to accumulate social capital. Studies of children living and working on the streets make this point forcefully (e.g.; Invernizzi, 2003), though these findings are not restricted to street-connected children (e.g. Howard, 2008).

A key point is that work is understood and experienced in much of the world as a pathway by which children attain maturity and social responsibility, before eventually becoming adults. The present authors have found this extensively in their own research in West Africa, and it has been documented elsewhere. Heissler (2012), for example, found that Bangladeshi teenage girls increased their respect and status in their families as a result of their work; while Pankhurst, Crivello, and Tiumelissan (2015) note that in contexts across East Africa, children's work is regarded and experienced positively, as a mechanism through which to integrate them into the reciprocal fabric of family and community life.

Embedded in the foregoing analyses, and in literature across anthropology and sociology, is the idea that *wellbeing* is the 'true' benchmark against which to evaluate children's work, and, by extension, policies aiming to limit it. Although rarely made explicit, wellbeing is present in almost all commentary, with Bourdillon et al. (2010) notable for making it the centrepiece of their analysis. In concluding their influential treatise on children's work, they argue that policymakers should ground their efforts in rigorous, scientific attempts to understand and advance child wellbeing, which they equate to the UNCRC's 'best interests of the child.' Although any individual experience of harm will diminish wellbeing, decisions over how to handle it must be made contextually and with reference to the overall bundle of inputs contributing to wellbeing or illbeing.

The view from human geography

Scholarship from human geography makes a valuable contribution to understanding harm in children's work. A common theme concerns the need for situated analysis that poses questions about the spatial patterns and impacts of economic development across various scales. Locating knowledge and practice about children's work in time and space also underscores the geographically and culturally specific nature of what may or may not be considered harmful.

Drawing inspiration from anthropology, many geographers have undertaken valuable studies of non-Western childhoods, challenging Eurocentric ideas of childhood, work and harm; see, for example, the work of Katz (1991, 1993) in rural Sudan or studies by Punch (2000, 2002) in Bolivia. Indeed, study of the diverse conditions under which children live is an important sub-area of geography research, revealing the impacts of changing landscapes for children and work around the world in response to structural drivers such as neo-liberalisation. Useful examples include work by

Abebe (2007) on changing patterns of children's work in southern Ethiopia; the study by Ansell and Van Blerk (2004) on migrant children's labour in Malawi and Lesotho; and the socially disaggregated study by Robson (2004) of children at work in rural northern Nigeria. Each of these underlines the importance of context for understanding harms, benefits and the trade-offs between them.

In addition, through centring children in their analysis and situating their perspectives and experiences within the broader structural landscape surrounding the work they do, geographers have contributed to rethinking the process of uneven development and the ways in which global capitalism shapes local realities, including children's work (Bessell, 2011; Dobson & Stillwell, 2000; Dyson, 2008). These grounded studies, which document and analyse multi-scalar processes, have been especially important in light of the generalisations about children's work characteristic of the institutional universe in which child labour policy is developed (McKinney, 2015).

A further important focus for critical geographers is representation and the ways in which our perceptions are shaped by the construction of knowledge. Nieuwenhuys (1996) reminds us that the concept of child labour is socially constructed and embodies a set of generalised representations of childhood (often originating in the global North), which are shaped by political and moral assumptions. This plays a role in both excluding and marginalising non-Western children, as well as denying their agency (Holt & Holloway, 2006).

Economic contributions

The economic literature on children's work and child labour is extensive, though it generally does not interrogate either the concept of harm or existing, mainstream approaches to it. The discipline tends to work with datasets built using ILO definitions and often within the context of national surveys. From there, regressions are conducted to examine the interaction between, for example, labour and poverty (e.g. De Hoop & Rosati, 2014; Del Carpio, Loayza, & Wada, 2016; Sarkar & Sarkar, 2016) or labour and education (e.g. Edmonds, E.V., International Labour Office & ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, 2008). But much is missed when exploring children's work in this way. For example, it is impossible to assess the overall impact that any specific work activity may have on wellbeing or illbeing (Roelen et al., 2020). Likewise, although some research explores the potential income and non-income benefits deriving from children's work – such as skills development (Basu, 1999) or the ability to combine work and schooling (Edmonds, E.V., International Labour Office & ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, 2008) – often it focuses only on whether and how income enhances variables which contribute to national economic growth, such as levels of education or health (Bourdillon et al., 2010).

However, there is one sub-field within economics that has shed considerable light on the concept and experience of harm – feminist economics and particularly its focus on unpaid care.[1] How the notion of 'care' is understood by society is intertwined with structures of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, and class. Worldwide, austerity measures and neoliberal reforms have worsened the impacts of patriarchy, with particular impacts for girls. As pre-neoliberal social protection structures were eroded by structural adjustment, poor mothers in the Global South were increasingly compelled to enter the workforce on poverty wages. This led more and more girls to shoulder the social reproductive burden, with significant impacts on their wellbeing and human capital formation.

Relatedly, a key consequence of neo-liberalisation in the Global North was the emergence of international care chains involving women from the Global South moving to richer parts of the world to provide care services that women in the North could no longer provide because of their own paid work responsibilities. This led to care deficits in migrants' home communities, again filled by young girls (Anderson, 2000; Folbre, 2006; Razavi, 2007). From the perspective of harm, these structural dynamics matter because evidence suggests that care work is routinely undervalued and that it can take place in circumstances that are abusive. Considerable evidence suggests that girls

especially suffer from physical and verbal abuse, isolation, seclusion and less time for school, at home or within domestic work outside of it (Murray, Amorim, & Bland, 2004; Sturrock & Hodes, 2016). As will be explored later, such working conditions have severe psychological impacts.

Feminist economists thus remind us both that the gendered nature of the global division of caring labour has political-economic roots and that its impacts are not equally distributed. Given this inequitable burden, it seems reasonable to assert, with Nieuwenhuys (2007) and others, that children, especially in the Global South, represent a vast reservoir of cheap and flexible labour that contributes towards circuits of global capital: 'Children's everyday work that is done unpaid is even more "for free" than women's and can therefore be tapped into ad libitum' (Nieuwenhuys, 2020, p. 130). This means that children, particularly girls, provide essential yet unremunerated 'services' which produce the value that drives local and global economic growth. The fact that this labour – like most caring labour – is unpaid makes it arguably a form of structural, economic harm.[2]

Importantly, ILO regulations are clear as to the potentially harmful impacts of unpaid care, with Convention 189, the *Convention on Domestic Workers* (ILO, 2011), establishing guidelines for what is and is not acceptable. However, in reality, the core of the ILO and mainstream approach to children's work centres on Conventions 138 and 182, both of which focus primarily on paid work outside a domestic context, typically done by boys, which arguably reproduces gender bias by drawing attention away from the vital and at times damaging work that girl children often do (Cullen, 2007, p. 156).

Developmental psychology

Beyond the social sciences, the two disciplines with the most to say about harm and how it can be understood are developmental psychology and health. We will address each in turn.

Developmental psychology has made important contributions to research on children's work and harm. It focuses on the processes through which individuals grow and develop cognitively, emotionally and socially. Studies routinely emphasise the centrality of human relationships in fostering child wellbeing or illbeing (e.g. Woodhead, 2004). Some have offered longitudinal insights into the ways in which children's lives are impacted over time (e.g. Haverman & Wolfe, 1995). This body of research has been important in making sense of the cumulative impacts of 'invisible' harms, and how the harm/benefit balance may shift over time (Sturrock & Hodes, 2016). While children may place greater emphasis on more 'immediate' harms, an understanding that takes on board the long-term effects of work activities is also vital.

The effect of work on children's psychological functioning was first raised as an issue by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1972. However, since then, these effects have largely been under-recorded (Fassa, Parker, & Scanlon, 2010; Sturrock & Hodes, 2016). However, a burgeoning literature does exist, especially in societies of the global North. But generalising this to the study of child work in the global South is not straightforward. The export of observational, attitudinal and other diagnostic instruments is especially problematic unless their content is thoroughly revised to ensure relevance to children's lived circumstances (Woodhead, 2004).

In the psychological literature, harmful work is most often associated with the sister concept of abuse (Fekadu et al., 2010), a pairing also shared by the WHO (Woodhead, 2004, p. 340). Children's experiences of abuse are known to be strongly affected by their gender. Girls, in particular, are vulnerable to sexual abuse at work, with the impacts intensified by stigma and shame.[3] However, boys and girls both suffer emotional abuse at work, which is manifest in: unreasonable expectations around productivity and standards; lack of encouragement and support; scolding and punishment, including ridicule, humiliation, harassment or shaming; and isolating the child and denying his or her needs or requests for help (ibid.).

Most occupation-specific psychological studies have focused on the relatively small proportion of child workers engaged in sex-related occupations and armed conflict (ILO, 2014). Domestic work outside a child's home has also been a focus. Findings suggest that, although potentially benign, this

can be rendered harmful by the conditions and social relations in which it takes place (Bourdillon et al., 2010). Some research suggests that domestic work under poor working conditions may be among the most harmful types of work (Sturrock & Hodes, 2016). In such situations, girls in particular may suffer physical and verbal abuse, isolation, seclusion, less time for school, and potentially sexual abuse (Murray et al., 2004). It is therefore equally important to factor in the issue of gender-based violence when defining and assessing harm. Gender-based violence not only occurs in the context of domestic work, but also within the family or educational institutions (Dunne, Humphreys, & Leach, 2006; Seth & Buhr, 2012).

Martin Woodhead and Barbara Rogoff are perhaps the most celebrated psychologists looking at the relationship between children's work, development and harm. An important observation made by Woodhead (2004) is that well-recognised physical hazards can have strong psychosocial consequences. Such hazards may include:

- Toxic substances, which impact the developing nervous system and in turn children's psychosocial functioning, as for example with lead.
- Unhealthy, noisy, poorly lit and poorly ventilated environments, which can affect children's general health, increase stress and fatigue and cause demoralisation. If children find it difficult to work in these circumstances, stress levels may increase.
- Dangerous tools, which without adequate safety precautions may induce stress and fear of accidents. Children may be traumatised by suffering or witnessing incidents. Children working in extreme conditions are especially vulnerable.
- If children do suffer an accident in which they are disfigured or disabled, this may increase the risk of social rejection, isolation and stigmatisation.

However, Woodhead's work also strongly suggests that whether or not work is experienced as harmful is more closely connected to relationships and the social context in which it takes place, than to the nature of the work itself. His six-country comparative field study is considered seminal in this respect (Woodhead, 1998) and has been supported by a variety of further studies which emphasise that cultural meaning-scapes are vital for understanding how any given experience is understood and processed as harmful or beneficial (Korbin, 2002; O'Kane, Barros, & Meslaoui, 2018; Rogoff et al., 2017). Woodhead (1998) further suggests that children often value their work because it provides them with self-esteem and pride, and because it can play an important role in their personal development by helping them build a sense of efficacy.

Likewise, the findings of Rogoff (2014) suggest that work situations may provide developmental benefits to children's competence in more specific, culturally valued cognitive skills such as alertness, and skills in collaboration, perspective-taking, self-regulation and planning, in addition to learning new information and task-specific skills. As mentioned above, numerous anthropological studies have confirmed these observations, with some also showing that work can foster a sense of resilience (Bolin, 2006; Boyden & Mann, 2005; Werner & Smith, 1992).

Health

Within academic and institutional literature on health and child labour, harm is most often understood in relation to injury or illness. The ILO classifies children's occupational health as an area of analysis at the interface between work and illness/injury, psychological functioning and physical and emotional development (ILO, 2011a). The WHO definition of 'child health,' on the other hand, encompasses the complete physical, mental and social wellbeing of a child and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (ibid.). However, in both cases, the ILO and WHO do not use the term 'harm' but rather focus on 'hazards.' We will come back to the importance of this point shortly, but for now let us note that it again leaves open the question of how to go about understanding harm in relation to children's work and wellbeing.

Ironically, from the perspective of health research, although one might assume that identifying harmful work is straightforward, in fact evidence on the health *consequences* of children's work is limited and misleading. Indeed, the vast majority of studies make conclusions about injuries and illnesses that *could* occur, basing assessments on general observations or on known risks to adults (ibid.). Illness and injury hazard rates by sector of employment tend to describe the *risks* faced by working children, but in the absence of comparison with a 'no work' counterfactual, they do not provide an effective basis for evaluating the impact of work on health and harm (O'Donnell, Van Doorslaer, & Rosati, 2002).[4]

In addition, from a health perspective, interpretation of all current estimates of the relationship between child labour and health is difficult given the absence of analyses that account for the potential endogeneity of child work activity to health outcomes. For example, if individuals born with a predisposition to poor health are also those who are most likely to engage in work as a child, correlations between children's work and health will overstate the impact of the former on the latter. Due to the potential intergenerational effects of toxic substances, some children who work may also begin their life with neurocognitive problems (Ide & Parker, 2005). On the other hand, if healthy individuals are selected into work early as children, the true health impact of their work will be understated. What is more, comparisons between the growth rates of working and non-working children in rural settings have so far provided mixed results (O'Donnell et al., 2002).

Many recent studies on the impact of work on child health are of poor methodological quality, lack gender-disaggregated data and do not build intersectionality into their designs. Sub-Saharan Africa is particularly under-researched (Kuimi, Oppong-Nkrumah, Kaufman, Nazif-Munoz, & Nandi, 2018), with little analysis of the relationship between child labour and wider contextual factors such as high tuberculosis and HIV rates. This is surprising given that AIDS orphans belong to one of the most vulnerable groups relying on work as a means of survival (Hurst, 2007).

Consequently, the overall global health burden of illness or injury related to children's work may remain underestimated, and perhaps even worse, poorly understood (Fassa et al., 2010; Ide & Parker, 2005; Kuimi et al., 2018; Shendell, Noomnual, Chishti, Sorensen Allacci, & Madrigano, 2016). ILO publications (e.g. ILO, 2011aa) often rely on data from studies undertaken in the global North – mostly from work-related injuries of children and young people in the US and Canada where routine data collection is much more complete (Fassa et al., 2010). However, these data do not always accurately capture informal and unpaid work undertaken by children, and they cannot fully reflect the situation in non-industrialised countries (ILO-IPEC, 2014). To date, there has been no correlation between whether a child works and whether he or she reports health problems (O'Donnell et al., 2002). Until the literature considers wider family and community effects, only part of the story will be told (Fassa et al., 2010). Likewise, without larger, longitudinal studies, including those which use proxies that are more contextually meaningful than those of ILO surveys, the long-term health implications and potential gender disparities of children's work – except for missed school days – simply cannot be accurately identified.

Towards a re-conceptualisation of children's work and harm?

This review of the literature points in a number of concluding directions. First, and arguably most importantly, is the idea that harm is relative, contextual and relational. Although certain elements of certain jobs may definitively harm children in certain ways – such as the use of pesticides which damage lungs – whether and to what extent that work may overall be considered harmful can only be established by situating it within the multi-dimensional context of aggregate positive and negative outcomes, as well as present and future opportunities (Maconachie, Howard, & Bock, 2020). For example, if a child takes a job using pesticides that potentially negatively affect her breathing but is able to avoid starvation through doing so, it would be bizarre to term that work

'harmful.' It may be dangerous, worse than theoretical alternatives, and reflective of gross inequalities and injustices, but it remains undoubtedly preferable to the ultimate harm represented by the actual alternative of death.

This underscores the point made above by the anthropological, sociological and psychological literature that understanding harm within children's work requires us to meaningfully answer multiple questions, including, at a minimum:

1) What are the individual physical, mental and social capabilities of the child?
2) What is the nature of the child's work, including hazards and hazard management strategies?
3) What is the social, cultural and economic context within which that work takes place?
4) What meaningful alternatives exist?
5) What benefits are actually and potentially derived from it?

Answering these questions effectively requires input from multiple sources, including children and the communities they inhabit, as well as subject-specific experts able to share scientific knowledge (for example on toxins or the psychological impacts of different forms of abuse) unavailable to most people. It further requires a mechanism for weighing up relative costs and benefits, as well as combining subjective and objective criteria. This will be no easy task and it suggests that any attempt to present harm 'objectively' is likely doomed to fail.

However, progress in advancing our presently limited understanding of harm in relation to children's work can surely be made. Important steps in this direction have been taken by Roelen et al. (2020) in their excellent recent review of the methodological landscape. They argue that contemporary approaches tend to self-silo by method, with a particular division between survey methods and qualitative or participatory methods. To move forward, they suggest, we need genuinely mixed-methods approaches that iteratively build the scalability of statistical tools on the contextually-attuned foundations provided by in-depth qualitative and participatory research. They further advise using child-friendly methods, consulting a range of respondents so as to be inclusive of diverse perspectives, and incorporating expert knowledge. They conclude by reminding us that little can be substantively established unless studies are conducted *over time*.

In policy terms, the implications of the foregoing discussion are clear. First and foremost, the literature reviewed strongly suggests that attempts to protect children from harm experienced in work by banning work itself are as futile as they are damaging. The evidence on this point is so clear that it begs the question as to why major institutions such as the ILO have so far failed to engage with it. One possible answer suggested by this review is that their approach suffers critically from an ongoing category error. That is to say, their efforts target *hazards* rather than *harms*. Sabates-Wheeler and Sumberg (2020, p. 7–8) explain that hazards can be understood as 'dangers inherent to a task or job, or an aspect or feature of the work environment,' while harms are '*identifiable negative impacts* . . . arising from a specific workplace hazard.' However, we know that the ILO approaches child labour in such a way as to equate the presence of a hazard (a *potential* harm) with the *actual* incidence of that harm. This collapsing of categories is both scientifically and practically problematic.[5]

What would be better? This review strongly points in the direction of wellbeing and multi-scalar attempts to foster it. Simply put, if we ask those keen to end child labour the question, 'Why?,' then the inevitable answer is something like 'So that children can have a better life,' which is entirely consistent with ideas of flourishing and wellbeing. And although most child labour policymakers currently refuse to walk through the door opened by that question, the increasing weight of cross-disciplinary evidence suggests that eventually they may have to. The anthropological and sociological critique documented above implicitly centres on the contention that efforts to ban child labour perversely thwart children's wellbeing. At the same time, psychological and health research is explicitly founded on the basis of a commitment to advancing what the WHO defines as health: 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity' (in White & Blackmore, 2016, p. 20). This latter point is particularly important: in focusing on work-related hazards, the ILO and its mainstream accomplices arguably miss the

wood of possible wellbeing for the trees of potential harm. Re-centring what they do to concentrate on wellbeing could, as Sarah White aptly puts it, provide a 'positive charge [that] offers a corrective to tired old problem-focused policy-making' (2016, p. 5).

Definitions of wellbeing vary and are the subject of scholarly debate (Gough, McGregor, & Camfield, 2007; White, 2015). However, there is general consensus that wellbeing is a dynamic, experiential phenomenon comprised of multiple subjective and objective inputs and produced 'through interaction with others and the contexts in which wellbeing is experienced' (White & Blackmore, 2016, p. xiii). Here it overlaps meaningfully with Capability Theory as developed by Sen (1993) and Human Needs Theory as articulated by scholars like Gough (Doyal & Gough, 1991). Each of these bodies of work recognises relationships and relationality as vital (as indeed does research on the 'goods' and 'bads' of children's work) (see Atkinson, Fuller, & Painter, 2012); foregrounds local meaning-scapes and individual agency (see De Berry et al., 2003); and argues that the structural conditions enabling or disabling wellbeing must be at the heart of analysis and policy (see White & Blackmore, 2016).

Arguably, a pivot of this nature away from harm and towards wellbeing would be revolutionary. In no way would it render harm irrelevant (after all, harm necessarily reduces wellbeing). But through de-centring harm it could open new opportunities for policymaking. Indeed, it would likely give policy-makers permission to approach children's work and the relationship between that and their wellbeing in radically new ways. For example, at community level, it might mean supporting child unionisation, investing in labour protections, vernacularizing health and safety advice, and fostering collaborations between educational institutions and employers. Given that wellbeing and the harm that undermines it are both irredeemably contextual, one might also imagine action research-type initiatives that seek to build on local expertise, to incorporate children's perspectives, and to use these to understand local problems and promote local solutions. At the other end of the scale, a recognition that wellbeing necessarily has structural roots opens the door for policy efforts that aim to create the conditions for wellbeing to flourish. At a minimum, this would require public service provision towards the meeting of basic needs, which in turn would require advocacy around the redistribution of resources and the taxing of global wealth.

Will the ILO and its allies be bold enough to move in this direction? We cannot say. But what this review makes clear is that attempts to meaningfully theorise harm – the concept at the very heart of the ILO's take on 'child labour' – inevitably lead us *away* from child labour and towards child wellbeing. And if wellbeing is genuinely the ultimate destination, then the ILO and its sister institutions need to reflect critically and radically on whether theirs is the best path towards it.

Notes

1. Unpaid care work is work done primarily by women and children to care for family members: cooking, cleaning, and shopping, as well as care of children, the sick, and the elderly. It can also encompass growing food for personal consumption, and collecting water and fuel – jobs that are categorised as productive activities (Razavi, 2007, p. 186).
2. See Reynolds (1991), whose study of the Tonga people in Zimbabwe focuses on children's work in subsistence agriculture. Using a range of methods to measure children's work, her research suggests that girls' work hours were longer than anyone else's, including adult men and women. Interestingly, although no adults considered childcare as 'work', the girls who were caring for the babies did.

   Note also that we could well deploy the concept of 'exploitation' here, but that is an extensive conceptual discussion unto itself and we prefer to avoid it for the purposes of the present paper.
3. Personal communication with Professor Jo Boyden, telephone interview, 16 March 2020.
4. Although researchers often interpret the need for a 'no work' counterfactual to entail the inclusion of a non-working comparison group, there are significant challenges in defining and identifying such groups. See Levison and Murray-Close (2005) for an informed discussion of these challenges and the research biases that can result.

5. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to reflect at length on why and how the ILO may make such an obvious error, it is worth noting that this strategy is entirely consistent with neoliberal forms of governmentality as theorized by Foucault, in which authorities try to cost-effectively manage risk through biopolitical interventions targeted at whole populations instead of developing more expensive, tailored policies adaptable to the differing needs of individual people and their circumstances (see Howard, 2013 for a discussion of this in the context of child trafficking).

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